

Social Media Policy

Version 2.1
March 2025

1 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to define the use of social media by the NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES), and establish the professional behaviours, standards and ethics expected of all members when using social media. Adherence to this policy will play a critical role in protecting the reputation, integrity and brand of NSW SES and its members.

Making comment on social media is common for NSW SES employees, whether it be in an official, professional, or private capacity. NSW SES recognises the benefits for members in embracing all types of communications, including social media, to enhance the reputation of the organisation, but through this policy, seeks to manage the challenges and risks that comes with them.

All NSW SES members will have some involvement with social media, either as a member of the organisation or as a private citizen. While they are a member of NSW SES, there are responsibilities and obligations under the NSW SES Code of Conduct and Ethics, and values they must uphold while using social media in any capacity.

This policy applies to all current NSW SES members, including, but not limited to employees, volunteers, spontaneous volunteers, contractors, sub-contractors, and consultants.

The scope of this policy also applies to the establishing, managing, use of, and decommissioning of NSW SES social media branded or associated social media platforms. Additionally, it covers social media platforms used in both a professional and private capacity by members.

The policy is applicable to all social media platforms, which NSW SES members use, including but not limited to: Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat, Threads, chat rooms, blogs, and podcasts.

2 Policy Principles for Social Media

2.1 NSW SES Code of Conduct and Ethics, and Values

Members must acknowledge and recognise that while interacting and engaging with social media platforms, they are governed by the organisation's Code of Conduct and Ethics, and values, which sets the standards for appropriate and professional behaviours.

The core values of NSW SES, which are also aligned to the values of the NSW Public Sector, are: Trust, Accountability, Respect, Professionalism and Integrity, and Safety and Service.

2.2 Consistent, open and transparent communication

- 1) NSW SES uses social media to communicate with communities across NSW, to meet its legislated obligations as an emergency services agency, share information, and promote the organisation. It is the responsibility of an Administrator to keep a record of relevant content that is posted and shared. This must be done in line with the Service's Records Management Policy and Procedures.
- 2) All content shared across social media must be consistent, open, transparent and in line with the needs and obligations of the organisation as an emergency services agency. Further, it is imperative any member sharing content across social media consider the implications it will have on themselves as a representative of NSW SES and the Service.
- 3) If in doubt, members should refer to the Media and Communications team for confirmation on content that may be posted by members on social media.

2.2.1 *During an emergency*

To ensure a multi-channel approach to informing communities during an emergency, NSW SES warnings must be shared across relevant social media accounts. This includes, but is not limited to, the Australian Warning System (AWS) - Advice, Watch & Act and Emergency Warnings published via the NSW SES website.

When social media is used to communicate information to communities during an emergency, it is the Incident Controller's responsibility to ensure there is a record of the content posted. This record must be made in line with the Service's Records Management Policy and Procedures.

Any content shared on social media with the purpose of informing communities during an emergency must maintain consistency with all previously disseminated information. This includes, but is not limited to, NSW SES Warnings and Bureau of Meteorology weather warnings. When a warning, such as an Advice, Watch & Act and Emergency Warning is shared, it must refer to and provide a link to the warning on the NSW SES website.

2.3 Protecting the brand and reputation of NSW SES

All members that engage and interact with social media platforms are representing NSW SES and its brand. As such, members must preserve the brand, image, and reputation of NSW SES. This means all branding, along with the information it is supporting, shared across social media must be consistent and align with the NSW SES Brand Style Guide. This includes, but is not limited to:

- The use of the NSW SES logo and its colours.
- The use of the Service's ranks and insignia.
- The use of branded promotional material.
- References to the NSW SES website.
- The presentation of members wearing NSW SES branded PPE or uniform in images and videos.
- Consistency in the representation of information and emergency messaging.
- Conforming to NSW SES policies and procedures.

Members must not use NSW SES branding across personal social media platforms or use their position with the Service to promote products, companies or campaigns, unless endorsed by the Senior, Media and Communications.

2.4 Responsible and appropriate conduct

This policy, along with supporting policies and legislation, including Code of Conduct and Ethics, outline what is deemed responsible and appropriate conduct of members when interacting with social media.

NSW SES members, whether on or off duty, must not publicly comment on, create, publish or exchange any content that could bring the Service or NSW Government into disrepute or tarnish their reputation. This includes written, auditory and/or visual content communicated via NSW SES resources or via personal devices on any social media platform.

2.5 Representing NSW SES

Members of NSW SES may identify themselves as belonging to the Service on social media. However, members must ensure they are adhering to their obligations as outlined in this policy, and other NSW SES policies, including the Code of Conduct and Ethics. Members are reminded that there is no such thing as a 'private' social media site, regardless of the privacy settings. If an NSW SES member makes any comment about, or in relation to, NSW SES on a social media site, and they identify as an NSW SES member, then they are making a public comment.

2.5.1 Using social media as an NSW SES representative

With delegated authority, a member may make comment on social media on behalf of NSW SES. When representing NSW SES in any capacity, authorised members must:

- Uphold the laws, policies, procedures, and frameworks that govern NSW SES.
- Uphold the Service's Code of Conduct and Ethics, and values.
- Remain politically neutral. Under no circumstances should public comments or published messages reflect a political view or opinion on government policies.
- Only post consistent and factual content about NSW SES operations, community resilience, emergency preparedness, and official campaigns.
- Not endorse, or create the perception of endorsing, unauthorised products, companies, or campaigns.
- Not post content which can undermine the role of NSW SES in any operation.
- Not post content which can infringe the privacy of others, including members or community members.
- Not create, post, 'share', 'like' or distribute inappropriate material, including obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, discriminatory or hateful (including racist, sexist, homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, xenophobic, ageist, and/or ableist) comments or other material online.
- Always respect the laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others.

Members must also ensure they are adhering to their roles and responsibilities with NSW SES when posting, sharing or commenting on social media. This includes, but is not limited to, the direct or indirect sharing of personal or commercially sensitive information, such as:

- Photographs (including photographs taken on phones and other devices) of individuals that members have assisted. Photographs and any other content must not contain information that can identify individuals, such as names, addresses, or other specific characteristics including car registrations.
- Details or images of minors without the written consent of their parent or guardian.
- Content or images which indicate or comment on the cause of an incident, particularly when it is speculative or not publicly known.
- Content which undermines or takes ownership of the declared responsibilities of another agency.
- Content which could cause embarrassment or harm to the image or reputation of NSW SES or the NSW Government.
- Content which is sensitive and breaches the Cyber Security Policy, including passwords, internal networks, and other confidential information.

2.5.2 Commenting as a private citizen

As private citizens, NSW SES members have the right to enter public debates and make private comment on any issue. However, when doing so, it is important that members cannot be identified, associated with, or perceived to be speaking on behalf of NSW SES.

It should be noted that you can identify yourself as an NSW SES member both directly and indirectly. For example, direct representation could be in the form of listing your title or position or being featured in images with fellow NSW SES members. Indirect representation may be in the form of posting images related to NSW SES, being a member of an NSW SES related

group or simply being known by name or image to fellow NSW SES members. If you do directly or indirectly identify yourself as a representative of NSW SES, you are no longer commenting in a private capacity.

As such, members who directly or indirectly represent NSW SES should always ensure that their activity online adheres to their obligations as outlined in this and other NSW SES policies, including the Code of Conduct and Ethics.

Furthermore, members must not:

- Disclose confidential information, which can harm the brand, reputation, and integrity of NSW SES.
- Make private comments on or directly post NSW SES documents which are not publicly available, whether confidential or not.
- Make any criticisms or negative comments of the NSW Government, Ministers, Members of Parliament, or Members of the Legislative Committee when identifying as a member of the NSW SES.
- Make private comments on NSW SES or NSW Government policies or programs they are involved in, advising on, directing, or administering, which could compromise their ability to perform their role with the organisation in an unbiased matter.
- Make any comments about an individual or group of NSW SES members which can be deemed bullying or harassing in nature.

2.5.3 Use of social media in a private capacity

As an NSW government sector employee and NSW SES member, your private use of social media can overlap with your professional obligations and impact the reputation of both our agency and the broader NSW government sector. While social media offers opportunities to engage, promote expertise, and share achievements, it also presents risks that must be navigated carefully. It's essential to understand these risks and how to manage them effectively.

To support employees in this area, the NSW Public Service Commission has developed guidance outlining key principles to consider when engaging online in a private capacity.

The full guidance when using social media for private use can be found here: [Use of social media in a private capacity | Guidance for NSW government sector employees](#)

2.6 Establishing social media accounts

All NSW SES branded social media accounts, or those perceived to be associated with the Service, are owned by NSW SES. As such, all public-facing NSW SES social media sites must be established, administered, and managed by the Media and Communications team, with support from delegated Unit members.

Permission from the Media and Communications team must be obtained before any new social media accounts are created. As with all NSW SES branded social media accounts, they must follow set content and branding guidelines as directed by the Media and Communications team.

The guidelines also specify set text and categories to be used when establishing a site or account. Existing sites and accounts must also follow these conventions.

Should a social media page or NSW SES-branded account need to be decommissioned, written advice must be provided to the Media and Communications team as a record. State and Zone social media sites and accounts must not be decommissioned unless authorised by the Media and Communications team or delegated representative. If a social media account is authorised to be decommissioned, then all relevant content from that account must be saved in accordance with the NSW SES Records Management Policy. This includes, but is not limited to, private messages, notifications and relevant comments.

All working group social media sites, such as Facebook groups, must be closed to the public. Membership to those groups must be administered by the Media and Communications team with support from delegated members.

NSW SES is required to comply with NSW Government cyber security policy, which includes restrictions on accessing prohibited social media platforms. Specifically, it is prohibited to download applications like TikTok on devices provided by the NSW SES. Furthermore, the creation of TikTok accounts on behalf of the Service's Zones and Units is forbidden. These measures are in place to ensure adherence to government guidelines and safeguard the security of NSW SES-issued devices and information systems.

3 Management of Sites and Accounts

All public sites and accounts are to be managed in accordance with the Code of Conduct and Ethics, and the Service's values, policies, procedures, and frameworks.

The Media and Communications team will retain administrative access to all NSW SES social media sites and accounts. The Media and Communications team has the authority to delete, edit, remove, close or suspend posts, Administrators or sites. Where such actions are required, relevant parties will be informed.

Where there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct and Ethics, policies/procedures, and/or State and Commonwealth laws, the matter will be referred to the relevant Director, as well as Director, People and Development and Senior Manager Media and Communications.

If an NSW SES member becomes aware of a social media site, account, material or posting that breaches this policy and/or damages the brand, image or reputation of NSW SES, the matter should be reported to their immediate supervisor and to the Senior Manager Media and Communications.

4 Privacy and Legal Liability

Members must protect and respect the privacy of all individuals and groups. As such, members should not post private details of others, or details of private conversations, share or 'tag' photographs with a colleague's name without permission.

Posting information about other NSW SES members without first seeking their consent may be a breach of the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW) and Health Records & Information Privacy Act 2002 (NSW).

A publication which damages the reputation of a person may be classed as defamation. Placing inappropriate material, making inappropriate comments about others on social media sites, or allowing others to do so, could result in members facing litigation for defamation proceedings.

5 Roles and Responsibilities

Policy Sponsor – Deputy Commissioner Corporate Services has overall responsibility and accountability for the Policy.

Policy Owner – Senior Manager, Media and Communications is responsible for the development, review and implementation of this Policy across NSW SES.

Senior Leadership Team – NSW SES Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners and Directors are responsible for the implementation of, and adherence to this policy across their functional areas.

Managers, Supervisors and Commanders – Managers, Supervisors and Commanders at all levels are required to ensure compliance with this policy by teams within their functional areas and team members under their direction.

All NSW SES members – responsible for adhering to this Policy. This includes all visitors, contractors, sub-contractors, or individuals otherwise engaged in the business of NSW SES.

6 Related Documents

6.1 Legislation

This policy is supported by the following legislative framework:

- *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth)
- *Government Sector Employment Act 2013* (NSW)
- *Government Sector Employment Regulation 2014* (NSW)
- *Government Sector Employment Rules 2014* (NSW)
- *Health Records & Information Privacy Act 2002* (NSW)
- *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)
- *Privacy & Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (NSW)
- *State Emergency Service Act 1989* (NSW)
- *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* (NSW)

6.2 Policy

This policy is supported by the following NSW SES policy documents:

- *Media Policy* (NSW SES)
- *Media Procedure* (NSW SES)
- *Alcohol and Drugs Procedure* (NSW SES)

- *Bullying and Harassment Prevention Policy* (NSW SES)
- *Code of Conduct and Ethics* (NSW SES)
- *Cyber Security Policy* (NSW SES)
- *External Complaints Policy* (NSW SES)
- *External Complaints Procedure* (NSW SES)
- *Fraud and Corruption Control Policy* (NSW SES)
- *ICT Acceptable Use Policy* (NSW SES)
- *Intellectual Property Policy and Procedure* (NSW SES)
- *Internal Grievances Policy* (NSW SES)
- *Internal Grievances Procedure* (NSW SES)
- *Legal Services Policy and Procedure* (NSW SES)
- *Mobile Device Policy* (NSW SES)
- *Password Policy* (NSW SES)
- *Public Interests Disclosure (PID) Policy and Procedure* (NSW SES)
- *Records Management Policy* (NSW SES)
- *Risk Management Policy* (NSW SES)
- *Volunteer Membership Policy* (NSW SES)

7 Support and Advice

You can obtain advice and support about this policy from:

- Your Manager or Zone Commander
- Policy Owner – Senior Manager Media and Communications
- Policy Sponsor – Deputy Commissioner Corporate Services
- By emailing media@ses.nsw.gov.au

8 Definitions

Term	Definition
Comments, Posts or Sharing	For the purpose of this policy, comments, posts or sharing, include, but are not limited to, any form of content that is created or shared via social media.
Inappropriate material	For the purpose of this policy, this may include, but is not limited to, posts that are unlawful, fraudulent, threatening, bullying, embarrassing, of a sexual nature, obscene, racist, sexist, defamatory or profane – whether obscured by symbols or not – or offensive.

Term	Definition
Member	For the purpose of this policy, is a public official in accordance with: Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988 (NSW) Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW)
Official use	For the purpose of this policy, is any authorised representation or communication in relation to NSW SES, its business, operations, policies or activities by or on behalf of a zone, region, business unit, or by a member in an official capacity.
Private comment	For the purpose of this policy, any communication or comment as a private citizen that may or may not involve personal views, comments or opinions about NSW SES. NSW SES supports members who choose to use social media in their capacity as private citizens, however, you should be aware that content published on social media sites is publicly available and may be considered an official representation for the purposes of this policy. This includes comments made on an NSW SES member's personal social media accounts.
Public official	For the purpose of this policy, is an individual having public official functions or acting in a public official capacity in accordance with the: Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988 (NSW) Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW)
Social Media	For the purpose of this policy, is any medium or platform, including websites and applications, that enable users to create and share information or to participate in social networking. Examples include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter (X), YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, Threads, Snapchat, Vine, online forums, closed groups, blogs, instant messaging, and any other websites that allow individual users or companies to use simple publishing tools.
Administrator	For the purpose of this policy, refers to an individual or role that holds administrative privileges and responsibilities over a social media account or platform. Administrators have elevated access and control over the account, allowing them to manage various aspects such as content creation, posting, monitoring, and engagement.
User	For the purpose of this policy, refers to an individual who has been granted access to a social media account or platform controlled by an organisation. Users can engage with content, post updates, and interact with other users, subject to the guidelines and policies set.

Document Control Sheet

Title	Social Media Policy
Current Version	2.1
Directorate	Corporate Services
Policy Owner	Senior Manager Media and Communications
Policy Sponsor	Deputy Commissioner Corporate Services
Effective date	15/05/2024
Next Review Date	15/05/2029
Rescinds	Social Media Policy v2.0
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Function	Community Engagement
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Version History

Version #	Creation Date	Author	Summary of changes
1.0	15/05/2024	Media Officer	Reviewed and updated.
2.1	19/03/2025	Coordinator Digital Marketing	Administrative update to include guidance from Office of the Public Service Commissioner – <i>Use of social media in a private capacity</i> – refer section 2.5.3.

Approval

Title		Date	Version signed off
Senior Manager Media and Communications	Policy Owner	19/03/2025	2.1
A/Deputy Commissioner Corporate Services	Policy Sponsor	08/05/2024	2.0
Damien Johnston	A/Commissioner	13/05/2024	2.0